

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Members of the House Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee,

I am writing to address a critical issue affecting the health and well-being of our state's most vulnerable citizens: access to dental care for children on Medicaid. As a concerned mother, registered nurse, and patient advocate for improved healthcare services, I would like to share the story of my daughter, who has endured significant suffering due to the current inadequacies in our dental care system, as well as the story of another little girl whose mother has permitted me to speak about today.

The first story involves a 5-year-old with multiple medical complexities that are known risks for dental issues. For nine months, she suffered from severe dental problems because of delayed care. Clinical and radiographic examinations revealed heavy plaque and calculus buildup on all her teeth, leading to generalized gingivitis. Despite having no caries, she had several other concerning issues, including partially erupted and unerupted teeth, root resorption on multiple teeth, and congenitally missing teeth. In March, it was determined that she required immediate treatment. However, due to the limited availability of a single surgeon at the hospital, she was not scheduled for the necessary procedure until December. This nine-month delay left her in considerable pain and highlighted the urgent need to improve access to dental care for Medicaid patients.

The second story is equally distressing and involves my 11-year-old daughter, Hannah, who has multiple medical complexities and takes several medications that are known risk factors for dental problems. Hannah has been waiting four years for dental X-rays and cleaning to be performed under anesthesia. Due to limited staffing, specifically dental staff, she could not be scheduled for these essential procedures at the children's hospital, along with months-long waiting lists to be seen by a sparse number of qualified general pediatric dentists who see children with medical complexities. During this prolonged wait, her unmanaged teeth grinding resulted in significant damage to several teeth. This situation underscores the severe consequences of inadequate dental care access for children with complex medical needs.

These stories are not isolated incidents but indicative of a broader systemic problem. Dental health is critical to children's overall health and well-being. Untreated dental issues can lead to chronic pain, infection, and difficulty eating and speaking, and can impact a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school. Moreover, poor dental health can exacerbate existing medical conditions, leading to more severe health complications.

We must address these issues and ensure that all children, especially those on Medicaid, have timely access to necessary dental care. This includes increasing the number of qualified dental professionals available to treat these patients, increasing provider reimbursement rates,

improving scheduling efficiencies, and ensuring that hospitals and clinics are adequately staffed and equipped to handle the demand for pediatric dental services.

Everyone deserves timely, acceptable, and compassionate healthcare that addresses all aspects of their well-being. I urge you to remedy the current shortcomings in our dental care system for Medicaid patients. By doing so, we can prevent unnecessary suffering and ensure that all children in Oregon have the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

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